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THE I AS SUCH: VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY'S *IA!*

Во время одной из наших встреч М., по обыкновению, читал свои последние стихи. Поневоле напрашивалось сравнение с тем, что должен дать, — с творческими возможностями поэта: Хорошо, сказал я, но хуже Маяковского.¹

...поэт не автор, но предмет лирики...²

Его спросили: Кто — я? Он ответил: Я: Владимир Маяковский. — А Владимир Маяковский — кто? — Я!³

Vladimir Mayakovsky's hyperbolic 'I' has long been remarked upon, beginning with the observations of his contemporaries such as Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva and Roman Jakobson. Mayakovsky's first book, which he entitled with the first person pronoun, *Ia!*, was also the only book by him that was produced in the futurist *samopis'ma* style. The book appeared in a small print run of three hundred copies in May 1913, the most productive year in the output of the futurist group. The poem cycle *Ia!* appears in later editions without the line arrangements, punctuation, and unique handwritten quality of the original publication.⁴ As Nikolai

¹ Роман Якобсон, 'О поколении растратившем своих поэтов' [1930], in: *Смерть Владимира Маяковского* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), p. 8.

² Борис Пастернак, *Охранная грамота* [1931], *Избранное в двух томах*, том 2 (Москва: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1985), p. 204.

³ М. И. Цветаева, 'Эпос и лирика современной России,' 1933, in: *Несобранные произведения* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971), p. 640.

⁴ All quotations of the poem in this essay are from Владимир Маяковский, *Я!* (Москва: н.п., 1913). As the 1913 publication will be inaccessible to most readers, the line numbers that follow all quotations refer to the poem as it appears in *Полное собрание сочинений*, том 1 (Москва: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1955), pp. 45-49. Quotations are from the poems roughly as they appear

Khardzhiev has argued, to properly understand Russian futurist texts one must look at them in their original form.⁵ While studies by Khardzhiev and Juliette Stapanian have drawn important analogies between Mayakovsky's work and modernist art of the period, the specific moment of the coincidence of Mayakovsky's poetics of self and the futurist poetics of the book has not been fully explored.⁶

The studies by Susan Compton, Gerald Janecek and Vladimir Markov have focused mainly on historical description of the futurist period and futurist book-making.⁷ This article draws on these works to integrate a reading of the poem and the book within the context of Mayakovsky's poetics. Although, as Janecek points out, Mayakovsky's book is not particularly innovative in design, the application of the futurist poetics of fusion of word and image to Mayakovsky's poetics of self in the form of a *samopis'ma* book is unique. Janecek's work identifies the linking of the visual and the word as central to the poetics of the futurist books, and as part of futurist attempts at creating self-sufficient signs. In Mayakovsky's poem this emphasis relates to the poet's poetics of self. Mayakovsky's early poetics combined two contradictory aims: to create a pure poetry of self, and the futurist-influenced aim to create completely non-referential, or self-sufficient, poetry. The former requires an unmediated existential relationship between the author and his work, while the latter requires a total severing of the poetry's relationship not only to the author but also to the world outside the poem. Both aims are seemingly beyond possibility of realisation, but the tension between the two is the source of much of Mayakovsky's poetic play in *Ia!*

Unlike the majority of the illustrations in *Ia!*, Mayakovsky himself was responsible for the cover of his book. The cover, by

in the 1913 edition, apart from the standard post-1917 Russian orthography, which is used for ease of comprehension.

⁵ Н. Харджиев и В. Тренин, *Поэтическая культура Маяковского* (Москва: Искусство, 1970), p. 42.

⁶ Juliette R. Stapanian, *Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist Vision* (Houston: Rice UP, 1986).

⁷ Susan Compton, *Russian Avant-Garde Books, 1917-34* (Cambridge: MIT, 1993); Gerald Janacek, *The Look of Russian Literature: Avant-Garde Visual Experiments, 1900-1930* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984); Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1969).

playing with self-representation, provides a source of confusion that goes beyond its disorderly form and layout to the issue of authorship. Although the illustrators are acknowledged on the cover ('Ris. Chekrygina i L. Sh. '), no reference is made to the cover illustration, which clearly differs in style from the two cycles of pictures within the book. The cover also does not credit the handwriting in the book to anyone. The title too raises questions of authorship. Normal distinctions between author and title become unclear. Could, for example, the title be 'V. Maiakovskii ia!' and thus be seen as attributing a self-sufficient and authorless status to the book? Or, on the other hand, is this a book without a title, with only the emphatic epithet 'ia!' accompanying the author's name? This deliberate confusion of author and subject exploits the linguistic qualities of the indexical pronoun 'I'. Indexical expressions are both context dependent and help determine the context in which they are used. Thus 'indexicals demonstrate unequivocally that understanding involves not just linguistic processing but depends as well on such cognitive faculties as perception.'⁸ In the particular case of the 'I' and the proper name Vladimir Mayakovsky, the ridiculousness of each term defining the other can only be understood by seeing the poem as referring to Mayakovsky the person, rather than as being an immanent aesthetic object. Thus in taking the personal nature of the lyric to its logical conclusion, the title page can be seen as emphasising either the self-sufficiency of the book, or, conversely, the book's relationship to the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and thus the world outside the poem.

The illustration on the cover further complicates the reader's impression of the relationship between the author, the book and the 'I'. Zhegin's recollection that the cover 'was worked on for an endlessly long time' suggests that the illustration should not be lightly excluded from a reading of the poem. Although Zhegin suggests that the drawing represents Mayakovsky's necktie, a synecdoche for the poet, the picture in its indefinite shape is suggestive of a head in profile with a nose, eye or ear, the hint of a mouth, and a beard or bowtie.⁹ There is also a curious relationship between the

⁸ Gennaro Chierchia and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Meaning and Grammar: An Introduction to Semantics* (Cambridge: MIT, 1990), p. 267.

⁹ Л. Жегин, 'Воспоминания о Маяковском,' in: *В. Маяковский в воспоминаниях современников* (Москва: Государственное издательство художественной литературы, 1963), pp. 100-102.

illustration and the title, *Ia!*, which, lying as it does in the bottom right hand corner of the cover's central section, appears to be an integral part of the picture, because it balances what resembles a nose in the top left corner. This interaction encourages the reader to see similarities between the picture and the letter 'ia' on the page. The cover thus seems to represent an attempt at fusion of the picture and the word in the self of the 'I' and the poet's self-portrait, or metonymic representation of self. Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh's argument in 'Bukva kak takovaia' that the basic material of poetry is not the word but the letter, written in 'pocherk, svoeobrazno izmennnyi nastroeniem', also finds support in the word-letter *ia*.¹⁰ The striving for an absolute, omnipotent word-letter and an absolute omnipotent individual self here coincides in the poem's title, *Ia!*

The cover picture thus reflects what Krystyna Pomorska sees as Mayakovsky's struggle to 'make new referents'. Parallel to the word made flesh, as Pomorska points out, in 'Man' the man is made flesh.¹¹ The cover of *Ia!* is a combination of these two tendencies in a 'word-man' made flesh; it is an attempt to make the 'I' self-sufficient, to make a 'new referent' out of the 'I'. This first attempt exploits the 'pictographic principle' of the futurists, which related to Kruchonykh's claim that translation of poetry is impossible and to seeing the visual as well as phonic aspects of letters as essential.¹² In another futurist manifesto, Mayakovsky claimed that the first move of the writer was from a word representing a subject to the 'word as a symbol, the word as an aim in itself'.¹³

The book in its entirety also binds the picture and the word closely together. Eight full-page illustrations alternate with the text. The handwriting continues throughout, although the style is different from that of the cover. The combination of elaborate manuscript and clumsy, rough, occasionally crossed-out letters reflects the poetics of *Ia!*, which challenges conventional notions of a

¹⁰ В. Хлебников и А. Крученых, 'Буква как таковая' [1913], in: *Манифесты и программы русских футуристов* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967), pp. 60-61.

¹¹ Krystyna Pomorska, 'Maiakovskii and the Myth of Immortality in the Russian Avant-Garde,' in: *Jakobsonian Poetics and Slavic Narrative: From Pushkin to Solzhenitsyn*, ed. Henryk Baran (Durham: Duke UP, 1992), p. 159.

¹² Janecek, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹³ Dmitriij Tschizewskij, ed., 'Три Чехова', in: *Anfänge des russischen Futurismus* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963), p. 27.

book of poetry and of the relationship between the signifying and self-representational functions of letters and words on the page. One example of this is the use of large, bold lettering for important words that Khardzhiev calls 'leitslova' like 'Raspiaty' (14).¹⁴ The role of a letter or word as a thing in itself appears too in the 'mirror writing' that Chekrygin includes in his pictures.¹⁵

The word's visual representation of itself is also present in the layout of the text. Just as a crossroads is the intersection of two streets, so in the opening poem of *Ia!* the Russian equivalent of this word lies across two lines:

пере-
крестком (13)

The policemen that are 'crucified' here also lie strewn across two lines:

Городо-
вые (15)

In this case the line break also emphasises the rhyme 'vyi/vye', just as the first example emphasises the partial alliteration 'kryvyia/krestkom', which is further enhanced by their positioning one below the other. Thus, the words visually represent the rhyme and alliteration they encode. In the second example, the line break draws attention to the semantic power of rhyme to split a word in two and, thereby, to change the meaning of its component parts. In this case the 'policemen' become 'cities-necks', so that their 'crucifixion' intersects with the hanging ('povesheny') and explains that metaphor. In fact, the explanation of this metaphor is given just like a mathematical formula: 'cities = necks'. This makes the metaphor, in a sense, circular and self-referential, as it seems to emerge out of the coincidence of the two words ('goroda' and 'vyi') in one ('gorodovye').

¹⁴ Харджиев и Тренин, *op. cit.*, p. 39. Khardzhiev and Trenin also note that Burliuk borrowed this technique from Tristan Corbière (p. 314).

¹⁵ Janecek finds this mirror writing impossible to decipher (p. 215). Stapanian, however, manages to decipher some letters (p. 129 and p. 167).

This kind of iconic wordplay is also present in the word 'Raspiaty' (14) on the opening page of the poem cycle, which not only enacts violence upon the 'policemen', but also upon the language itself. The elaborate rhyme with 'fraz piaty' (4) encourages the reader to break 'Raspiaty' into a compound of the two elements 'ras' and 'piaty'. This pun on the two meanings of the root -PIAT- associates heels with spots, blotches, and stigmata. The implied stigmata could thus be the marks of heels upon the crossroads. At the same time, however, the heels in the poem represent phrases or sentences. Thus, 'Raspiaty' is also the dispersion of language, like that which is occurring in the poem itself. The violent break up of a word through rhyme yields a meaning that describes this violence upon itself and upon language in general.

The word most often subject to violence is the 'I' itself in its passage through the cycle. The movement begins explicitly in the opening part of *Ia!* with 'idu odin', and in its final lines the 'I' is still moving alone by means of the same verb:

Я ж одинок, как последний глаз
У идущего к слепым
Человека (31-2)

This is another example of words representing themselves. The presence of the 'I' throughout the cycle acts as a visual enactment of this movement through the book. The path of the 'I' in this way links the disparate parts of the text.

At the same time, as it travels through the poems, the 'I' itself disperses into the text and the cityscape:

По мостовой моей души
изъезженной
шаги помешанных
бьют жестких фраз пяты (1-2)

Here the 'I' by extension to its soul becomes the object of the violence of language. The words 'shagi' and 'piaty' associate this violence with pounding feet, both on the ground and like feet in verse meters. The 'piaty' are, in turn, pulses of language ('fraz'). These marks of language also become through rhyme the stigmata of crucifixion and, so, connect the suffering of the 'I' with that of the

'gorodovye' (15). The 'I', then, is both the subject and object of grief, which 'rydat' implies (12). As it walks, 'idu' (11), the 'I' is also an initiator of this violence of feet and language. It, thus, becomes both the one trampled and the one doing the trampling.

In the title of 'Neskol'ko slov o moei zhene' the possessive adjective moves even further away from the 'I' and attaches itself to another person. This entails a dual movement that both subjectifies the object, the 'zhene', and objectifies the 'moei', which was previously associated with the 'dushi' (2). This line of feminine nouns does not stop here, but forms an integral part of this poem's internal coherence:

Идет луна

жена моя

Моя любовница рыжеволосая (2-4)

The lack of punctuation in the first edition makes the relationship between these nominative nouns less explicit. Nevertheless, the pivotal contrasting conjunction 'A', which comes right in the middle of the poem, in the eleventh of twenty-two lines in the collected works, and on a new page in the first edition, seems to make relationship of the 'ia' to these nouns clear. The rhyme 'moia/ia' (3, 11), however, reveals the 'ia' within 'moia' and confuses the opposition. It gives an explanation for the wedding, to which 'venchaetsia' (7) refers, and prepares the reader for another rhyme with 'ia':

Ведь это ж дочь твоя моя же

песня (19-20)

The rhyme 'tvoia/moia' reveals a binary opposition and, once again, the common element in both words, the 'ia'. The 'I' and the other become the creators, the parents of the 'doch', which, like the 'pesnia', is also the creator of its two main elements, the 'I' and the other. So, the 'I' that moves between subject and object now takes part simultaneously in another oscillating polarisation. The 'zhena' (3) and 'pesnia' like the 'dushi' (2) are both an extension and a dispersion of the 'I'.

This double movement towards dispersion and fusion with the other is made explicit in the previous line:

В бульварах я тону тоской песков

оваян (18)

The merging of the 'I' with the 'bul'varakh', which recalls that of the 'dushi' in the second line, takes place phonetically in the metamorphosis of the first person present verb 'tonu' through 'toskoi' into 'peskov'. Each stem has an initial or final part in common with the next, yet 'tonu' and 'peskov' lack any shared sounds. The movement is not only from animate to inanimate, but from singular to plural. The connection is the abstract noun of emotion 'toskoi', through which the subjective moves to the objective.

Family members, the daughter and the wife, provide one way in which the self is extended and broken up. Dismemberment supplies another. Unlike the 'piaty' (4) and 'vyi' (10) of the introductory section, the second part of the poem links its body parts directly with the 'I' and with the 'you':

А я

несло же палимому бровей коромысло
из глаз колодцев студенные ведра
В шелках озерных ведь ты же висла
Янтарной скрипкой пели бедра (11-15)

This ABAB rhyming 'stanza' divides neatly into two halves. The later version destroys the steady reduction in syllables (13>11>10>9) through the four lines that provides an accompanying movement 'iz glaz' of the 'I' to the visual description of the last two lines. The reflection in rhyme of the 'bedra' in 'vedra' is a verbal enactment of eyes reflecting the subject of their gaze. Thus the eyes, detached from the 'I', become the point of contact between self and other, just as in the introduction the action 'rydat' (12), which the lines here describe, is the meeting place for the 'I' and the 'gorodovye' (15). Here, however, pieces of both self and other dance together. The cognitive outwards movement provides a static description of the whole ('ty') hanging ('visla') that recalls the earlier description of the city, which is 'povesheny', 'v petle' (6-7). The dispersed body parts, on the other hand, interact in a dynamic way. They mix through rhyme and the eye, which is a point of contact between internal and external, giving birth to the song ('peli') that will be their daughter.

If in 'Neskol'ko slov o moei zhene' the offspring of marriage is the poem, then in 'O moei mame' the 'I', as the son, takes up this role. Indeed, this poem, which stands at the centre of *IA!*, marks a further objectifying of the 'I'. Here, for the first time in the cycle, the speech of the 'I' is distinct from the lyric as a whole (21-26). Another displacement of self to a body-part immediately precedes this change:

И когда мой лоб венчанный шляпой фетровой
Окраивит гаснущая рама (17-18)

As Edward Brown observes, this appears to refer to the 'I' at the window, which appeared earlier in the phrase 'podkhozhu k okoshku' (5), in the rays of the setting sun, which are implied by 'Zaigraet vecher' (4).¹⁶ The scene disperses and rearranges itself in such a way that, as Stapanian notes, the persona through its 'lob' becomes subject to the action of the personified 'rama'.¹⁷ This increases the objectification of the 'I'. The distancing of the 'I' shows up the hint of the root -VN-, which means 'out, outside', in 'venchannyi'.

Stapanian also sees the window, 'okoshku' (5), which now sits on the temporal border between day and night, as a boundary between the inner and outer worlds, as well as a framing device through which one perceives them.¹⁸ This recalls the role of the 'glaz' as a meeting point between subject and object in the previous poem (13) and, thus, highlights the origins of the word 'okoshko' in the old Slavonic word for 'eye' ('oko'). Here the window, like the eye, is also a point of cognition, through which Mama's thoughts pass from inside to outside:

Мама знает это мысли сумашедшей
ворохи
Вылезают из-за крыш
завода Шустова (14-16)

¹⁶ Edward J. Brown, *Mayakovsky: A Poet In Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), pp. 84-85.

¹⁷ Stapanian, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153.

¹⁸ Stapanian, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

'Venchannyi' (17) echoes the role of marriage ('Venchaetsia') as a point of contact between self and other in the second poem of the cycle (7).

This boundary point, like the eye in the second poem, is a source of dynamic interaction, but this time, instead of the harmony of 'pesnia' in 'Neskol'ko slov o moei zhene' (20), its form here is the violent verb 'okrovavit' (18). Like the 'Raspiaty' (14) in the introduction, the verb associates the breach of boundaries with crucifixion, as the frame and bloody brow suggest an icon of a 'crucified Christ crowned with thorns'.¹⁹ The association with the window hints at a play on the two unrelated meanings of the root -KROV-, 'blood', and 'cover, close', suggesting a link with the verbal noun 'otkrovenie', which is a figurative opening or externalisation of self. The physical breach of skin, which 'okrovavit' implies, dramatises this uncovering that breaks open the self by discovering a breach of meaning in language.

The opening sentence of 'Teper' pro menia' has become one of the most controversial in Mayakovsky's oeuvre. It is a cruel demarcation of self that places the 'I' as far away as possible from the other ('dети') not only emotionally but also physically in the line of verse:

Я люблю смотреть как умирают дети (1)

Leonid Katsis has pointed out that this line echoes Annensky and Rozanov's religious philosophy. Happiness at the death of child reflects the Orthodox belief that children were sinless. Mayakovsky plays on this paradox inherent in religion by celebrating their deaths. This reading relates to the image and role of the monk, which Katsis identifies in Mayakovsky's poem. The image of the monk also differentiates the self utterly from the masses in a hermetic separation, which paradoxically accompanies the total identification with the city and the masses. Thus Katsis's historical reading raises essentially the same poetic tension between individuation from and total identification with the world that is present throughout *Ia!*²⁰ The sense of self in the poem comes at the expense

¹⁹ Stapanian, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

²⁰ Л.Ф. Кацис, *Владимир Маяковский: поэт в интеллектуальном контексте эпохи* (Москва: Языки русской культуры, 2000).

of violent separation from the surrounding world, yet this separation itself emphasises the connectedness of self and world.

The violence of the 'I' in its language becomes explicit in the following lines:

Слов иступленных вонзая кинжал
В небо распухшего
Мякоть (17-18)

This leads again into individualised speech, which, by means of address to another that is also part of the 'I', 'otets moi' (20), describes violence on the self:

Это тобою пролитая кровь моя
дорогою дольней
Это ж душа моя ключьями порванной тучи
В выжженном небе на ржавом кресте
колокольни (22-26)

The identification of language as a source of violence, a 'slov...kinzhal' (17), makes this report of violence also an act of self-mutilation. Now dismemberment ('dusha' and 'krov') and dispersion ('kloch'iami') are at their most vivid. Dispersion ranges through rhyme from the earth ('dol'nei') to a heavenly peak ('kolokol'ni'). Language too breaks and reforms. The change from 'kloch'iami' to 'kolokol'ni' suggests a role for the latter in the tearing up of clouds ('porvannoi tuchi'). Ironically, this ultimate act of objectification through violence on the self splatters the innards of that self across the entire land and sky, breaking down all boundaries between self and the gigantic other of this poetic universe.

The 'I', however, then returns to a frame:

Время
Хоть ты хромой богомаз
лик намолуемой мой
В божницу уродца века (27-30)

Another powerful force ('Vremia') contrasts with the now apparently powerless 'I'. Power, though, remains in the power to derive the words 'khromoi bogomaz' that the 'I' uses to address 'Vremia'. The

epithet's derisive pun on the Greek version of this other's name (*khronos*) also betrays the connection with painting ('bogomaz') that comes through the Greek word for colour (*khroma*). Khronos, who, according to Greek mythology, ate his children, recalls for the reader the violence of the father against the 'I' in the preceding lines. This violence is also present in the play on 'namaliui', 'namoliui', which lost its place to the former more obvious and palatable word in later editions. The self is also, once again, present in the other, in the 'moi' of 'khromoi'. The appearance of 'moi' in the following line, in close visual proximity to 'khromoi', emphasises this connection of the other to another of the self's parts, its 'lik'.

This archaic, Church Slavonic word for face hints both at a word's death due to disuse, as well as the word's modern use for a face on an icon, a use that the next line confirms ('v bozhnitsu'). Placement in the icon seems a natural progression for the 'I', whose suffering increasingly resembles that of Christ on the cross, and whose 'dusha' is 'na rzhavom kreste'. There is a place in the icon for the 'I' as 'Khristos iz ikona bezhal' (13). The image of Christ's escape through animate action brings the static, inanimate nature of an icon's image into sharp relief.

This highlights the role of the icon as an objectifying frame that surrounds and constricts the 'I', like Christ, in an historical, symbolic role as a symbol for a past event. Yet, the icon in the Russian Orthodox tradition is a two-edged sword, because it is not just a static symbol, but a physical embodiment of Christ, much like the 'word made flesh' of the futurists. The language of the final two lines, in a similar way, dynamically embodies the image of the 'I':

Я ж одинок как последний глаз
У идущего к слепым
Человека (31-2)

Here the rhyme with 'veka' reveals the facial features of a 'cheloveka' that hide within that word. 'Chelo' and 'veko' along with 'glaz' are all parts of a 'lik' (29). They are not static at all, but moving ('idushchego'). Again, the vivifying movement also entails fragmentation.

The second to last line explicitly identifies the 'I' with a 'glaz', which was earlier in the cycle a point of contact between self and

other. After the Church Slavonicism, 'lik', it also sounds like the Church Slavonic form of 'golos', 'glas', perhaps the 'glas' that speaks these lines. The self-reflexivity does not end here, however, for the eye, as it was in 'Neskol'ko slov o moei zhene', is also a framer of vision, like the word 'bozhnitsu' (30) and the words 'rama' (18) and 'okoshku' (5) in 'O moei mame'. The word 'glaz' captures the verbal and visual duality of the poems themselves and, like *Ia!* itself, it is a frame for the words of which it is also a part. It is the voice of the words and one of the words spoken by that voice; it is part of the image and provides the vision for the image. The eye is a frame, a window ('okno' < 'oko') that disrupts definitions of self, objectifying the subject and subjectifying the object. The other 'I', *Ia!*, enacts this disruption within the framework of a book.

Pomorska writes of Mayakovsky's 'Nash marsh' that the 'relocation [of the revolutionaries to the heavens] is inseparable from a transformation of the body, and art is organically, even physiologically, connected with this transformation'.²¹ The mythical man becomes the self-sufficient resource of art. This tendency manifests itself in the final section of *Ia!* On the one hand, the movement into the sky in the final part of the poem happens simultaneously with the body's transformation into scraps. At the same time, the pictures that immediately proceed and follow the section mark a move to heaven, from a primeval pagan man through a saint, to an angel and finally a god-like figure.

In a sense, the process of moving through *Ia!*, in either reading or writing, of following the progress of the 'I' and its dislocations through the text, creates *Ia!* the book. Since the 'I' is both the container and the contents, the process of self-definition necessarily involves a violence on the self and, thus, within the language of *Ia!*. Yet this violence in the end leaves the self and the poem's language indistinct and indefinite in meaning. The poem's final image itself suggests an ironic end to the striving for individuation: the 'last eye' that sees cannot be seen by the blind, which means that no one can see it, so its individuality cannot be recognised.

The 'eye' with which the poem ends also emphasises the visual aspect of the poem. The 'I', the eye, and the icon at the end of Mayakovsky's poem lead the reader back to the cover. The poem ends with the placing of the 'I' in an icon, while on the cover the relationship of the word 'I' to the picture makes the 'I' an iconic sym-

²¹ Pomorska, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

bol. The cover of *Ia!* exploits the tension between the self-sufficiency of the title and the relationship of the 'I' to the poet Mayakovsky. The indexical symbol 'I' mediates the movement from symbolic to iconic; it points, just as the imagery in the text points, to its own referent, which is the book itself. The book represents an attempt to embody the 'I' in order to become self-sufficient, to become a book made flesh. As we saw, however, the indexical 'I' is also, ironically, the aporia in the utopian aim for the self-sufficient book, for, as an indexical, it requires context and can ultimately only be understood through reference to the poet Mayakovsky. This problem arises from the combination of the futurist poetics of the self-sufficient sign with Mayakovsky's poetics of self and becomes a major theme in the poem. The enlargement of the 'I' to include everything in the world of the poem is accompanied by the violent dispersal of the 'I'. This tension between fusion and fission, between identification with the world and separation from it, creates the dynamic world of Mayakovsky's *Ia!*

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